



CONCEPT PAPER FOR THE STATE OF ARKANSAS
MATURE WORKER EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY INITIATIVE

REVISED NOVEMBER 7, 2005

Due to changing demographics and workforce needs nationwide, the awareness and appreciation of mature workers needs to be elevated in the national discussion by policy makers, business leaders, trade associations, labor unions and community organizations. AARP hopes to greatly enhance this discussion by launching a national Workforce Initiative to increase opportunities for mature workers' successful navigation of the public and private workforce system. Included in this national Workforce Initiative is a plan to provide new points of access to training that will allow mature workers to remain competitive in the job market and further to provide them connections to employers who value their experience.

The AARP Foundation Workforce Initiative is a multi-level and multi-faceted program that will help individuals 50+, regardless of income level, remain in the workforce as desired. Its primary goal is the creation of a new national consensus about the value of mature workers and their impact on the US economy in the coming decades. In launching this Workforce Initiative, AARP is partnering with leaders in the business community to become a respected resource for information, tools and research to facilitate the development of long-range business strategies of investing in the mature workforce.

Bureau of Labor Statistics data support growing concerns about the impact on the economy of major demographic shifts in the labor force between 2004 and 2012:

- A disparity will exist between the number of "entrants" (those in the 16 – 25 age range) to the workforce and the number of "exits" (age 55 and older) from the workforce.
- Surveys of businesses project that 61% of these "entrants" are not fully qualified to begin work.
- One key factor is simple demographics: up to 43% of the current workforce is eligible to retire in the next ten years and the two generations now in the workforce following the Boomers are each at least 15% smaller.
- At the same time, projections indicate that, as a percentage of the workforce, those aged 16 – 39 will decrease from the 1982 rate of 61% to only 46% in 2012, while the percentage of workers aged 40 and older will increase from the 1982 rate of 40% to 56% in 2012.

The statistics above point to coming critical shortages of experienced and capable workers, and certain industries are already experiencing worker shortages and are reaching out to find new pipelines of qualified employees. AARP is uniquely positioned to make the connection happen between the employer and the mature job seeker, as the fastest growing component of the labor force, via its new Workforce Initiative. However, these efforts require more than a single media promotion or annual event. Creating this national awareness around the value of mature workers requires AARP to create, facilitate and maintain connections between disparate groups and segments of the national business infrastructure, and in particular at the state level.

For these reasons, the AARP Foundation's Workforce Initiative seeks to more fully engage and develop a partnership with the State of Arkansas to spark ongoing dialogue with its target audience, to realize more routine inclusion of mature worker issues in the national dialogue, and to work alongside representatives of the following groups (among others):

- **AARP Foundation Workforce Initiative Featured Employers,**
- **the United States Department of Labor,**
- **selected high-profile national trade associations and other national organizations with special interest in workforce and training issues,**
- **the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and**
- **a number of training partners on the local and national level, including ACT and selected community colleges.**

ELEMENTS OF THE ARKANSAS PLAN FOR THE MATURE WORKER

The following is an outline of some suggested activities that the State of Arkansas, under the leadership and guidance of Governor Huckabee, can engage in to successfully partner with the AARP Foundation's Workforce Initiative and leverage the momentum of the Initiative to benefit Arkansas' mature workforce.

1. **Issue a proclamation from the Governor designating an "Arkansas Mature Worker Day,"** intended to help raise the visibility and recognition of the value of mature workers in the state.
2. **Announce the creation of the "Arkansas State Task Force on the Mature Worker"** to be the planning group charged with the design and, thereafter, the oversight of the implementation of the Arkansas State Mature Worker Employment Opportunity effort. This group would develop a joint conference with the Department of Economic Development and report on the State's progress following this Conference.

The membership on the Task Force will be a self-selected group of representatives from the Arkansas State Workforce Investment Board. On Tuesday, April 12th, the State WIB convened and created five subgroups/task forces. One of the task force opportunities available was the Mature Worker/Workforce Initiative task force. This task force will be a standing committee within the State WIB and will have a committee chair and vice chair. Once membership is determined for the task group, additional members will be added to the group to assure that all interests are represented.

On behalf of AARP Arkansas, Cecil Malone will participate on the Task Force to facilitate the presentation of resources and information available from AARP on the national level, as well as state information that may be of assistance to the Task Force. Additionally, Kathleen Rapp from the AARP national office will serve in an advisory capacity.

In addition to spearheading efforts around the Governor's Conference, the Task Force would conduct and gather research on the current level of employment of mature workers, and on the successes as well as the barriers to finding employment in the state. This research would help to form the basis of the content for the Conference. Research assistance from AARP would also be

used to help underline the level of concern, the need for employment, as well as the specific barriers to it.

The Task Force could appoint smaller working groups, in preparation for the Governor's Conference, to review the successes as well as the barriers for mature workers within specific arenas, and thereafter, to prepare recommendations for consideration by the Governor and/or the legislature, as well as for a presentation to the Governor's Conference.

2. **Convene a Joint Conference with the Department of Economic Development with a focus on Arkansas' Mature Workers** to take place in 2007 (to coincide with the already planned state economic development conference).

This major state conference would present opportunities for the key stakeholders to include presentations and review of the issues affecting and the opportunities for mature workers. Key conference events could include meetings of the Chambers of Commerce, the Workforce Investment Boards, the trade associations that are supportive of the Workforce Initiative, small business associations, training institutions, etc. In short, this would be a campaign to include the issues of mature workers "on the agenda" of the key opinion leaders and of those organizations with the capacities to help mature workers.

Among the other goals to be determined by the Task Force, this anticipated joint state conference would seek to:

- a. Highlight and build upon those efforts already underway in Arkansas to create additional workforce resources for its citizens and its businesses.
- a. Create a means of raising state-level visibility, interest, and recognition of mature workers within the media and among opinion leaders.
- b. Create a high-level event in which the critical components of the various systems important to the identification, recruitment, assessment, screening, training, and placement of mature workers could be pulled together to look at what the various systems around the state are doing currently and what could be done in the future to enhance these offerings to mature workers.
- c. Engage the state-level business leadership to focus on mature workers and on the means by which they can access them.
- d. Within the context of the business engagement, seek the leadership of groups as well as individual representatives of small and medium-sized businesses in an effort to "extend the reach" of the Workforce Initiative to smaller employers.
- e. Use the influence of the Governor to focus the state and local workforce systems as well as the community colleges and public-sector training systems on ways to better meet the needs of mature workers for assessment, counseling, training, and placement.
- f. Create a stronger relationship between Arkansas' Department of Economic Development and the Department of Workforce Services.

All of this would be done in concert with AARP as a co-host and would include the involvement and the active participation of the AARP State Director, Maria Reynolds-Diaz and Cecil Malone to help with the planning and the logistics in preparation for the event.

The goal would be to hold a Conference in each of the next two years at a minimum. In the second year, one critical goal of the Conference would be to review the progress on expanding opportunities for mature workers, as well as for implementing additional activities designed to further enhance their opportunities.

4. **In 2006, the Taskforce will hold a series of regional meetings** throughout the State on the issues, the barriers, and the opportunities for the expanded employment of mature workers. This would engage the legislature and provide context and understanding of both the issues and the opportunities for enhanced employment for mature workers.
5. **As part of the State Plan of Work, the Task Force will create and implement a state communications campaign.** Working with AARP and the AARP Arkansas State Office, the Task Force will produce a multi-media campaign to raise awareness following the 2005 event. The campaign could include posters, bill boards, and TV and radio coverage – either pro-bono or paid advertising, which would be co-sponsored by AARP. As part of this media campaign, information on mature workers should be added to the newly launched “Arkansas Jobs Link” website that invites mature workers to post their resumes. The employers side of the site could also be linked to AARP’s website for information on how to recruit, hire and manage mature workers.
6. **As part of the Rapid Response program and the potential of a one-day rapid response workshop, AARP information from its Job Loss Help website could be adapted for use specifically in Arkansas.** Arkansas has a program for employees being laid off from major businesses that are closing called Rapid Response. Here, people who have been notified of job loss can immediately find industries and businesses that are hiring in the state. As part of the Mature Workers Employment Opportunity Initiative, specific AARP information could be made available to the mature job seeker.
7. **Create a series of ongoing activities** to carry out the goals established by the Governor for each critical component of the Arkansas economy, including:
 - Employers, both large and small
 - The Workforce System
 - Training institutions
 - Labor leaders
 - Racial and ethnic minority groups
 - Others as appropriate to the State.